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SUBJECT: PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER STRIKE ENTERS THIRD WEEK

REF: 06 KINSHASA 1462

¶1. (U) Public school teachers across the DRC have been on strike for long-promised salary increases since September 3, when schools were supposed to open. The national Congolese teachers union, Syndicat des Enseignants du Congo (SYECO), and the Catholic teachers union, Syndicat des Enseignants des coles Catholiques (SYNECAT) also demand that the GDRC close the salary gap between teachers of different grades, and between teachers in different provinces. Some public school teachers are reporting to work, but refusing to teach. Most parents have kept children at home since the beginning of the strike, partly in response to perceived threats of violence against those who attend classes. The strike is now in its third week with no end in sight.

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There They Go Again  
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¶2. (U) The September public school teacher strike has become an annual ritual, lasting for two weeks in 2005 and for two weeks in 2006. The GDRC and civil servant unions approved the 2004 "Mbudi Agreement," named for the location where it was signed, mandating higher civil servant salaries (reftel).

The government has yet to implement the increases, generally considered to be unrealistic given current budgetary constraints. The GDRC has now also banned the practice of "motivation fees" paid by parents to supplement low public school teacher incomes. The GDRC and the unions took similar actions last year, and the teachers were on strike for one month before the Catholic Church convinced them to go back to work. (Note: Catholic schools, taken over by government decree in 1995, represent less than 10 percent of the total, but wield inordinate influence due to the power of the Church and their superiority in education. End note.) Many parents continued paying motivation fees last year and basic salary levels remained virtually unchanged, despite GDRC promises to take up the matter in budget discussions once the new government was in place.

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Kabila on Teachers  
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¶3. (U) During his recent two-hour-long press conference, President Kabila deflected comparisons of parliamentarians, salaries (USD 4,000/month) with teachers, salaries (avg. USD 50/month), saying that even if the parliamentary pay was divided up among all teachers it would only amount to a few

dollars each. (Note: The USD two million per month paid to 500 deputies would cover the monthly salaries of 40,000 teachers. End note.) Kabila has now promised to raise teachers, wages to the first level of the Mbudi agreement (approx. USD 70), but has not specified a start date. Kabila also indicated that the GDRC would not tolerate threats against schoolchildren. "I am not saying that they (teachers, union members) will be thrown in the river, but we will be tough with them." The mayor of Kinshasa this week authorized USD 300,000 in "transportation fees" for the estimated 30,000 teachers in the city, but the unions are promising to continue the strike until the GDRC meets all of their demands.

14. (U) Comment. The GDRC is unlikely to be able to meet the teachers, salary demands, considering the strain that this would place on an already overextended budget. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) continues to push for a census to count those teachers actually in the classroom when they are not on strike. This would allow the GDRC to put its meager resources dedicated to primary education (estimated at less than one percent of the national budget) into the hands of a smaller number of real teachers rather than the inflated ranks currently on the books. End Comment.  
BROCK